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UNCLAS HALIFAX 000349

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE

E.O. 12958: N/A

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SUBJECT: HALIFAX PORT AUTHORITY SEES SECURITY AS JOB ONE

SENSITIVE BUT UNCLASSIFIED -- PROTECT ACCORDINGLY

¶1. (SBU) SUMMARY: Halifax Port Authority officials stressed to Ambassador Cellucci during his recent visit that security has been and will continue to be a top priority at the port, whether for containers or for cruise ships and their -- mainly American -- passengers. HPA is interested in participating in "Operation Safe Commerce." END SUMMARY.

¶2. (SBU) Ambassador and Consul General met October 10 with the chairman and senior executives of the Halifax Port Authority to receive a briefing on port operations and to see at first hand how the port is addressing security issues. Chairman Al Abraham and CEO Karen Oldfield stressed that as its business grows the HPA sees security -- for containers as well as for cruise ships and their passengers -- as a top priority. VP for Marketing Patricia McDermott noted that the port had been successful in attracting new shipping business -- total containerized cargo was up over 10% from last year -- as well as cruise ship visits, which have more than doubled in five years. Most of the passengers are Americans.

¶3. (SBU) VP for Operations and Security George Malec said that the port's focus on security predated September 11, 2001. Well before that time the HPA had a contract with the Halifax Regional Municipality to provide police services for the port, an arrangement that Malec characterized as unique. As a result of the HPA/HRM agreement, the port has immediate access to the full resources of the Halifax police department. The port also coordinates security with Canadian federal government entities including the RCMP.

¶4. (SBU) All of the HPA officials stressed their interest in ensuring that any U.S. concerns about security at the port were resolved promptly. "We want you to feel comfortable" about the port, Abraham said. Malec said that the HPA welcomed the presence of U.S. officials to implement the Container Security Initiative, and that the VACIS system was operating well. Oldfield noted that about 5% of containers coming through Halifax were physically screened, a rate she contrasted to competitor Montreal's level of about 3%. Oldfield also said that the port wanted to be involved in Operation Safe Commerce (OSC) if at all possible.

¶5. (SBU) COMMENT: The port's management team is impressive, and certainly seems dedicated to addressing any concerns that the USG might have about security issues. HPA's willingness to participate in port security initiatives such as OSC could prove useful as we move U.S.-based innovations abroad. END COMMENT.

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